DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 099 PS 027 768

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TITLE Improving Social Skills at the Elementary and Secondary Level.

PUB DATE 1999-05-00

NOTE 62p.; Master's Action Research Project, Saint Xavier University and IRI/Skylight.

PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Action Research; *Behavior Change; Behavior Problems; Classroom Environment; *Cooperative Learning; *Elementary School Students; Elementary Secondary Education; *Interpersonal Competence; Program Effectiveness; Role Playing; *Secondary School Students; Student Behavior; Student Journals

IDENTIFIERS Social Skills Training

ABSTRACT

This action research project examined the impact of a social skills intervention to reduce the amount of inappropriate, rude, and disruptive behavior from elementary and secondary students. Targeted for this study were elementary and secondary students in three schools in rural western Illinois. The problems of lack of preparation for class, off-task behavior, inappropriate language, physical contact, lack of respect, and excessive noise were documented by means of a teacher survey and data on student discipline referrals. The 16-week intervention consisted primarily of direct instruction of social skills, formation of classroom rules, and the use of cooperative learning. In addition, role playing and physical rearrangement of classrooms were incorporated. To assess the effects of the intervention, behavior checklists, classroom performance checklists, and student reflections in pictures or journals maintained over the course of the intervention were examined. The findings indicated that at one school, there was a positive effect of the intervention on excessive talking, insubordination, and lack of class preparation and a negative effect on arguing and physical contact. At the second school, there was a positive effect on four of the targeted behaviors. There appeared to be little impact on student behavior at the third school. (The data collection instruments are appended. Contains 31 references.) (Author/KB)

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ED 433 099

# IMPROVING SOCIAL SKILLS AT THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY LEVEL

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & Skylight

Field-Based Master's Program

Chicago, Illinois

May 1999

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Improving Social Skills at the Elementary and Secondary School Levels

Students in the targeted classrooms were exhibiting inappropriate, rude, and disruptive behavior. Due to lack of social skills, students exhibited a lack of responsibility to be prepared for class, incomplete homework assignments, unnecessary physical contact, excessive noise, foul language, and insubordination. The targeted population consisted of elementary and high school classes.

The probable causes for the lack of social skills in the students were: changes in family structure; more latchkey children or children cared for by non-family persons; and economic distress. Social changes and lack of parental control were major causes of these problems.

After reviewing research literature, the interventions selected were: direct instruction of social skills, formation of classroom rules, and the use of cooperative learning. In addition to these strategies, some role-playing and physical rearrangement of classrooms was incorporated.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in awareness of social skills, an increase in appropriate classroom behavior, and an improvement in student responsibility. As a result of the research, the researchers recommended parents be involved, more concentrated direct instruction be included, and each social skill be expanded.

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# CHAPTER 1

## PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

### General Statement of the Problem

Students in the targeted classrooms exhibited inappropriate, rude, and disruptive behavior. Evidence for the existence of the problem included anecdotal records, teacher surveys, and classroom observations.

### Immediate Problem Context

The targeted schools, school A and school B, were in rural school districts located 30-50 miles from metropolitan centers and were predominately agrarian. This small community in the Midwest was the largest city in the county. The town had a population of 13,000 and had two separate school districts.

The enrollment of school A was approximately 650 students. The district covers a geographic area of 45 square miles. There were two school buildings where students are divided by grade level: K-6 in the elementary school and 7-12 in the junior/senior high school, and each building has its own principal.

The student population in the junior/senior high school was 317. Forty teachers were employed in the 7-12 division, which was using an eight-block schedule. The teacher to pupil ratio was 14 to 1 with 77% of the teachers having a bachelor's degree and 23%

having a master's degree or above. The average teacher had 15 years experience and an average salary of $30,775. Sixty-seven percent of the teachers were female and 32% male. All of the teachers were Caucasian.

The student population was 91% Caucasian, 7% African American, and 2% other. The school averaged 24 students per classroom. The attendance rate was 95% with a chronic truancy rate of .3% and a mobility rate of 8%. Nineteen percent of the students were categorized as low income with the district spending an average of $4,300 per student per year.

School A offered many programs. The school provided the Channel One program, Teacher's Assistants (TA), and tutorial time at the end of the school day. There was also a breakfast program provided for all students who wanted to take advantage of it.

Extracurricular activities included a wide variety of sports such as football, volleyball, baseball, softball, boys and girls basketball, track, golf, and a girls cross-country team. In addition, there was a weight room available after school for those students wishing to work out. Extracurricular clubs included the Key Club, Media club, American Foreign-Exchange Student program, Quill, Future Farmers of America, the school play, and both jazz and pep bands. There was also the National Honor Society and a student achievement discount card, which was supported by participating town merchants. The students had to maintain a 3.0 grade point average to acquire this card which was distributed at the end of the semester.

School B was a school district located in the same rural community. The enrollment is about 1,900 for the district that included four elementary schools, one of which also housed the junior high, and one high school. The high school had a total

enrollment of 650. The school district included 44 square miles. The racial background of the high school was 87% white, 6% African American, and 7% Hispanic. The teachers were all Caucasian. Out of the 31 teachers at the high school level, two-thirds were male and one-third was female. The high school building also housed four classrooms of special education students, several of whom were mainstreamed into regular classes. The average class size was 20 and the pupil to teacher ratio is 20 to 1. In this district, the teachers had 17 average years of teaching experience with 58% who held a bachelor's degree and 42% who held a master's degree or above. The average teacher's salary for the 1996-97 school year was $36,000. The attendance rate for school B was 90% with the chronic truancy rate at 4%. The graduation rate was 85%. School B had 130 students on free lunch, 25 on reduced price lunch, and 445 on regular priced lunch.

School B had several special programs. The sports program included football, tennis, volleyball, golf, cross-country, basketball, bowling, wrestling, track, baseball, softball, cheerleading, and pompons. Some of the other extra curricular activities were student council, speech, debate, school newspaper, science club, Key Club, Natural Helpers, Children Learn Other Ways Naturally (C.L.O.W.N.s), Art League, band, and choir. Some other organizations were Future Farmers of America, Future Homemakers of America, National Honor Society, library club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, yearbook, and the American Foreign Exchange Student program. The school also had junior and senior class plays. The school provided programs for students who are college-bound and for those who were entering the workplace after graduation. The school also had a TI-IN satellite class program that allows students to take courses that would not normally be taught at a school of its size.

School C in this study was a unit district with about 800 students. The district consists of three schools: a prekindergarten and kindergarten, an elementary, and a junior/senior high school. The student population was almost all Caucasian with only a few Hispanic students. The attendance rate averaged 97%. The district employed 60 teachers of whom 20% were males and 80% were females. The teacher-to-student ratio was 20 to1 with 87% of the teachers who held bachelor's degrees and 13% who held master's degrees or above. All of the teachers were Caucasian. The average teaching experience was 12 years and the average annual salary was $29,000.

The schools had many programs including Title 1 and gifted challenge programs, which employed special education and resource personnel. Reading and mathematics classes were multiple-age groups. High achieving students were recognized on an honor roll program with names published in local newspapers, and teachers had to make at least two positive contacts per week with parents. The computer labs were available for students' individual use and elementary classes received instruction 30 minutes a week. Principals had a Parent Advisory Committee that met once a month to discuss issues. The elementary principal gave the Principal's Award of the Week (PAW) to encourage positive student behaviors with recognition and rewards. The schools had a breakfast program available to all students. Two after-school tutoring programs were available. One had tutors who were high school volunteers and another used senior citizen volunteers. School C had two all-day kindergarten classes and a state funded prekindergarten program. Students were building a background in writing through the Writing Across the Curriculum program. About ten of the teachers were shared between buildings due to an eight block schedule in the junior/senior high school.

## The Surrounding Community

In the fall of 1835, a small group of men gathered in the vestry of the Congregational Church in a town in Connecticut and formed the Connecticut Association. The purpose of the organization was to move westward and establish a colony promoting the cause of education and piety. The Connecticut Association set out and arrived in Illinois in the winter of 1836. By the summer of 1839, there were five boys and eight girls of school age. Thus, the founding fathers established the first school in an old log church within the settlement. The school district A is now one of two public school districts in the city.

The community, where school B is located, was settled because of the railroad coming through the area in 1854. The town's first major industry was coal. The community just south of the town began to grow north with the building of new homes and businesses. The two separate communities overlapped and have become one community with two separate school districts in the town.

Besides two school districts within the city limits, there were two parochial elementary schools and a two-year junior college five miles south of the town. Serving the area was a public hospital also located within the city limits. The hospital had approximately 100 beds and a physician-staffed emergency room. Taxi service, as well as train and bus service, provided transportation to points outside the city. Three highways pass through the community along with an interstate highway 11 miles to the north of town. The community's park district maintained a public golf course and many neighborhood parks. A soon-to-be completed swimming pool project will provide an aquatic center tailored to families. Nearby was a state park with fishing and camping, a

private country club, and a small, non-commercial airport. The town had over 25 churches with many denominations represented. For over 100 years, the YMCA had been serving the area. The community had an active senior citizen center that provided services for the town's retired citizens.

The population of the city decreased from 14,500 in 1980 to 13,000 in 1990. At one time, the city had many small manufacturing firms but that number has declined drastically in the last 10 years. Only construction, communications, finances, repair services, health services, and public administration have shown gains in the number of people employed in the last 10 years. Manufacturing and professional services employed 53% of the work force.

The housing market dropped as the employment opportunities have diminished. The median monthly mortgage payment had risen from $300 in 1980 to $400 in 1990, while the median value decreased from $28,300 to $27,100 in that same time. In 1990, of the 5,875 housing units available, 3871 were occupied by the owner; 2,004 were rented; and 499 were vacant. There were 236 additional housing structures built from 1980-1990, the lowest gain since 1949, when statistics became available.

As illustrated in the 1990 census, the county in which schools A and B were located had experienced significant economic decline during the last decade. Poverty, unemployment, and other measures of economic health have generally increased more for this area than for the state in total.

However, recently from an employment standpoint, the community's future looked bright for the first time since 1974. The county had a yearly unemployment rate less than 4% this past year. A juvenile correctional facility was to be built on the outskirts of the

town and should bring a combination of temporary and permanent jobs once it is operating. The local labor market would benefit also by bringing new workers into the area.

The gender comparison decreased 1% in the same time period with females being 54% of the population in 1990. The Caucasian population dropped from 13,717 in 1980 to 12,212 in 1990. In the 1980's, the Hispanic origin category had shown the only increase from 268 to 317. All other categories, such as African American, and Asian/Pacific Islander had all decreased.

The median family income had risen to $23,040 in 1990 compared to $18,667 in 1980. The number of wage earners were the largest group with rising incomes to $3566, followed by Social Security incomes and retirement incomes. Non-farm self-employment, public assistance, and farm self-employment categories follow in descending order. The category of income per household was led by the $15,000 to $24,999 range that occurs in 1,311 households, followed by 790 households in the $25,000 to $34,999 range.

Of the 8,661 persons 25 years of age or older, 3,249 had a high school diploma. Associates' degrees were earned by 529 persons and 496 received a bachelor's degree with 270 continuing their education to earn a graduate or professional degree. Six hundred fifty-four residents were presently attending college.

School C was in a small, rural community in the Midwest, and the district served three small townships that cover 110 square miles. The elementary school was one of three school buildings in a city of almost 3,000 residents. There were six agricultural businesses in this community. The community included several restaurants, convenience stores, and a grocery store. The community had ten churches, a public library, and several

museums. There were two medical and dental clinics, banks, law offices, and a park district. The park district had many activities that were organized for all age groups including a municipal pool to provide entertainment for families. More than ten fraternal and professional organizations were among groups that financially support school activities and classrooms. Further educational opportunities were available with two community colleges and one private college within twenty-five miles.

Swedish settlers first settled this community in the mid-1800's. They settled here because it was near the railroad and had abundant farmland. Swedish customs and traditions were still promoted at this time. The community was 98% Caucasian and 2% Hispanic. The median household income was $22,000 and the per capita income was $11,000. In the agricultural area, the average farm income was $30,000. In this community of 3,000, only 10% of the adult population had a bachelor's degree or higher education. About 60% of adults were in the workforce and of the other 40%, less than 10% were unemployed and 30% were no longer in the work force. Almost 80% of the population lived in a family setting with about 10% who lived in a single-parent family setting.

The school population changed over the years from a peak in the late 1960's at 1200 students to a low in the late 1970's at 700. School population increased since 1990 to 800 with a per student expense of about $4,200.

One of the main concerns of the community was to keep taxes down while keeping the quality of the educational service high. Another concern was keeping parents and the community involved in the school. Consolidation was another concern for a small community, but most communities did not want to lose their local schools.

## National Context of the Problem

Although school discipline has been a problem in this country for 200 years, concern has never been as high as it is today (Hartwig and Ruesch, 1994). The number one problem facing the nation's local, public schools, as identified by the 1997 Gallup Poll, is the lack of student discipline.

Both new and experienced teachers have at some time or other been challenged by the behavior of one or several students or an entire class (Petrie, 1998). Most teachers would agree that discipline problems are an inevitable part of life in classrooms, even with generally well behaved groups (Susi, 1996).

A Fourth Poll asked teachers to estimate how frequently each of the 18 discipline problems occurred in their classrooms (Phi Delta Kappan, May 1997). The top three problems occurring most frequently in school were listed as schoolwork/homework assignments not completed (71%), behavior that disrupts class (58%), and talking back to or disobeying teachers (50%). Although the percentage has dropped slightly since 1989 for incomplete homework, the percentage has increased for disruptive and disobedient behavior.

From a survey of 713 secondary schools in 48 states, Purvis and Leonard (1985) stated not completing assignments or homework ranked number one in the top five critical behavioral incidents in the nation's secondary schools. Number five, among the top five student inappropriate behaviors, was not bringing books and related materials necessary for instructional purposes to class.

Although these behavioral incidents are not violent, the frequency of occurrence of either of these incidents in a class setting poses a problem of magnitude for the teachers (Purvis & Leonard, 1985).

Coming to class unprepared and not organized means a loss of student time on task. Time on task not only increases learning opportunities but also prevents discipline problems by keeping attention focused on productive school activities. The more time students spend on task, the greater the probability of increased learning and the less idle or down time available for them to engage in mischievous or other inappropriate school behaviors (Stainback, 1987).

Not only teachers, administrators, and parents acknowledge that discipline was a major concern, but high school students themselves are very well situated to see what is happening. Seventy-one percent of the respondents said there were too many disruptive students in school and 79% said that learning would improve if schools insured students got their work done on time and completed assignments. Fifty percent of the respondents said too many students got away with being late to class and not doing their work (Phi Delta Kappan, 1988).

Surveys of elementary school children revealed that their chief school-related concern is the disruptive behavior of their classmates. Teachers have similar concerns. Almost one-third of public school teachers indicate that they have seriously considered leaving school because of student misbehavior (Kilpatrik, 1992).

"In the not-so-distant past . . . children knew that if they got in trouble at school, they'd be in twice as much trouble at home. Consequently, a vast majority of children came to school with built-in-respect for teachers" (Kohn, 1996, p. 145).

In the mid 1990s, a lack of civil behavior had become a topic of enormous concern not only to educators but to elected officials and the general public. Nearly 90% of Americans believe civility is a problem in American life. In a Gallup Poll, Langdon (1997) cited 3% of those surveyed listed lack of respect as a concern. As educators, a decline in civil behavior is perceived and seen as a serious threat to the well being of students and teachers in schools.

The need for respect is self-evident. Respect is the basis and foundation for several of the other basic values of life. Children who learn both to implement and to understand the principle of respect will be better members of society, better friends, and better leaders (Eyre & Eyre, 1993).

Based on a special Gallup Poll conducted in late February 1997, Americans today continue to come down strongly in favor of strict disciplinary standards for children (Newport, 1997).

In a document reporting on student performance and attitudes Adler (1985) stressed that laxity in deportment can be "completely frustrating to the efforts of the best teachers. Students must be required to behave in class and in school in a manner that is conducive to learning" (p. 61).

Clearly, behavior problems in the classroom create a tremendous challenge to educators. The maintenance of order and control among students is central to the functioning of schools.

# CHAPTER 2

## PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Students exhibited inappropriate behavior in the targeted elementary and high school classrooms. The students did not know how to behave in appropriate, effective ways that were conducive to learning. This lack of social skills interfered with classroom activities and academic achievement.

### Problem Evidence

A survey was given to teachers in the three schools in a county in western Illinois. The summary of the data is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Results of Teacher Survey

| Behavior | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of Preparation | 8 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| Off Task | 9 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Inappropriate Language | 9 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Physical Contact | 9 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Lack of Respect | 9 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Excessive Noise | 9 | 0 | 2 | 1 |

Seventy-one percent of the teachers were of the opinion that students often come unprepared for class and 29% believe that students sometimes come to class unprepared. Seventy-nine percent said students were often not on task, 17% reported sometimes,

and 4% reported seldom on task. Eighty-three percent marked often when asked about students' use of inappropriate language. That left 17% who believed students seldom used inappropriate language. Seventy-nine percent of the teachers surveyed explained that students often used unnecessary physical contact, 17% marked seldom when asked about unnecessary physical contact and 4% recorded unnecessary physical contact was never used. Eighty-three percent of those who answered the survey mentioned they often saw the lack of respect for peers or teachers as a problem in the classroom and 17% consider that sometimes lack of respect was a problem. Seventy-nine percent of the surveyed teachers figure they often had excessive noise in the classroom, and 21% seldom had a problem with noise.

For all schools, the baseline data was gathered in a nine-week period and included behavior checklists, student referrals, and teacher observations. Lack of preparation is defined as no assignment, late work and being off task. Disrespect is determined to mean excessive talking, arguing, and fighting. A summary of the number of incidents and behavior categories are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2

Frequencies of Behavior Referrals by Month in School A

| Behaviors | March | April | May |
|---|---|---|---|
| Excessive Talking | 6 | 9 | 10 |
| Insubordination | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| Lack of Preparation | 13 | 22 | 17 |
| Arguing | 2 | 5 | 3 |
| Physical Contact | 1 | 3 | 2 |

There were 16 students involved in this class in school A during the nine-week period. Of the 102 incidents recorded, 49% dealt with a failure in the student-to-student

relationship or the student-to-teacher relationship. Fifty-one percent of the incidents dealt with a students' own lack of responsibility for being prepared. This lack of preparation included no assignment, late work, and being off task.

Table 3

Categories of Discipline Referrals and Frequencies by Month in School B

| Behaviors | March | April | May |
|---|---|---|---|
| Excessive Talking | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| Insubordination | 6 | 2 | 2 |
| Lack of Preparation | 60 | 41 | 78 |
| Arguing | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Physical Contact | 0 | 2 | 0 |

In school B, there were 31 students involved in this process. There were 204 incidents recorded, and of these, 80% dealt with disrespect of others. Upon further analysis, the researchers found that 21% were off task. Being off task includes all types of lack of preparation.

Table 4

Categories of Discipline Referrals and Frequencies by Month in School C

| Behaviors | March | April | May |
|---|---|---|---|
| Excessive Talking | 41 | 23 | 30 |
| Insubordination | 15 | 4 | 4 |
| Lack of Preparation | 102 | 74 | 111 |
| Arguing | 9 | 10 | 7 |
| Physical Contact | 2 | 2 | 3 |

There were 21 students involved in school C. Out of the incidents recorded, 30% dealt with a failure in the student-to-student relationship and 8% were from a failure in the student-to-teacher relationship. The researchers also found that 8% of the students were off task and 62% exhibited a lack of preparation.

## Probable Causes

Changes in family structure, latch-key children or children cared for by non-family members, and economic distress are all contributing causes for why children grow up without learning sociably acceptable behavior in the classroom. Many students in these categories may continue to fail to learn.

The targeted schools are all located in a western Illinois county. Like other communities throughout the nation, these targeted schools also reflect the problems experienced by society in general. Single-parent families, working mothers, low-income households, and disintegration of family life have produced children lacking social skills.

Among the three targeted schools, according to the 1990 census, 36.7% of family households were unmarried with families. Of the total 14,374 family households recorded in 1990, 485 family households were male households, and 1,538 were female households, indicating evidence of a change in traditional family structure. Single, as well as married mothers, are among today's work force. Many have left their children unattended at home to handle difficult situations on their own. Without parental supervision, the children had been left with few boundaries. The statistics from the 1990 Census illustrate this trend in the targeted schools. Fifty-eight percent of mothers with children under 6 were working mothers. Seventy-eight percent of females, with children 6-17 years old, were also among the labor force.

There was also evidence of economic distress among the families in the targeted schools. As stated in the 1990 census, 12.4% of families with related children under 18 and 35.8% of female household families, fell below the poverty level. Social problems, to be sure, were nothing new. Poverty and latchkey children were not

recently invented; but in today's society, these were problems that were growing more pervasive. The researchers suggested the social world of children was more dangerous now than 40 years ago. Garbarino (1997) reported that violence, poverty, and disruption of family relationships all contribute to why kids today are in trouble. He further reported that the Index of Social Health for the United States, produced by Fordham University's Institute for Social policy, indicated a decline in the overall well-being of our society. From 1970-1992, the Index of Social Health demonstrated a decline from 74 to 41 with 100 being the best. In 1976, 10% of all children studied, using a tool called "The Child Behavior Checklist," were to be candidates for therapy. By 1989, 18% were judged to be in need of counseling and therapy (Garbarino,1997).

The breakdown of family life has led to lack of parental supervision in homes today. Garbarino (1997) found that, over the past 30 years, some studies reported a 50% decrease in the amount of time parents spend with their children. Fawcett & Rasinski (1995) reported two-thirds of employed parents with children under 18, acknowledged that they were not spending enough time with their children. Along with lack of parental involvement and supervision, Dobson (1992) believed parental attitudes toward disciplining their young have changed quite rapidly as well. In the home and outside, the trend has been steadily toward more permissiveness, that is, placing fewer restrictions and limits on behavior. In 1991, Fiske stated that many students watch mindless television; or R-rated videos until midnight; or use illegal substances or alcohol. Educators certainly cannot be blamed for the condition children are in when they arrive at school each day.

The researchers found that economic, social, and personal factors are associated with the lack of social skills; and the basic social skills are missing in many of our students. These social skills are essential for building interpersonal interaction related to community, school, and family.

# CHAPTER 3

# THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

## Literature Review

Iannaccone, Wienke, and Cosden (1992) wrote that a lack of social skills was viewed as a critical factor contributing to the social problems of today's youth. As defined by the teacher-researchers, lack of social skills caused inappropriate behavior among peers and others, including lack of respect and consideration for others. In the classroom, the lack of social skills often manifested itself through incomplete homework assignments, lack of preparation for class, unnecessary physical contact, excessive noise, foul language, and insubordination.

Lack of parental control and the breakdown of family life, as reported by Elam and Rose (1995), were major causes of an increase in discipline problems in the school and lack of social skills in students. Elam and Rose stated that disruptive student behavior is a major factor contributing to teacher stress and job dissatisfaction. Parents also expressed teachers' concerns regarding student behavior. Other social problems and outside pressures contribute to the difficulty schools are experiencing in maintaining good discipline. Dobson (1992) believed that what goes on in the classroom cannot be separated from the problems occurring in society at large.

Boyer (1991) drew the inevitable conclusion that the problems of society have affected schools, dramatically distracting and even damaging children, reducing their motivation and capacity to learn. In its report, "The Conditions of Teaching, 1990", The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, provided firsthand documentation of the difficulties that teachers confront. Today's children are living with many more stresses than children of a decade or even five years ago. Single-parent families, dual-employed parents, unemployed parents, and teen parents have produced children with few or limited coping skills. Fiske reported in 1991 that 60% of today's students live in families where both parents, or the only parent work. Parents are too busy or too uneducated to help and families are unraveling. Two-thirds of all preschool children and three out of four school-age youngsters, have mothers in the labor force. For many students, schools are the family.

Dobson (1992) suggested women as part of the work force is a process that has been going on since the second World War. More and more mothers are working outside the home. Mothers working outside the home have deprived children of the constant guidance and sense of security they need in their early years. Since many of today's parents themselves grew up without proper role models at home, they have no clear vision of what it means to be a good mother or father. Some were abused as children and others were given little guidance or few boundaries.

Burbank and Kauffman (1997) reported that:

> Today's young people are simply a reflection of what they see adults in their lives do. They see popular sports figures who seem to be always on the edge

> talking trash, scowling at close calls, and flashing intimidating looks at their opponents. They see politicians demeaning each other; they see their parents impulsively cursing and gesturing at traffic snafus; they see television talk show hosts encouraging guests to abuse each other verbally. They see, in short, an in-your-face-trip-wire-culture that has very few face-saving devices built into its fabric. This is not the kind of climate that will optimize learning (p. 321).

A range of other social problems is directly related to the functioning of schools. Economic distress ranked high on the list. Fiske (1997) reported one in five children lives under the strain of poverty. Millions of students had no place to study and even middle and upper middle class students came to school unprepared because their families were undergoing the stress of everyday life.

Clearly schools are not in a position to solve all society's problems but they must find ways of minimizing the negative impact of such problems on teaching and the learning process. Regardless of what students bring to school, teachers are expected to maintain an orderly and supportive environment so all class members have opportunities to learn and experience success. Gottfredson, Gottfredson and Hybl (1993) found that misbehaving youths displayed less academic competence, disliked school, had more delinquent friends, and had lower levels of belief in conventional social rules than did their conforming peers. They tended to display poor interpersonal relations and were often rejected by peers because of their aggression and poor social skills. DeLuke and Knoblock (1987) agreed that students who demonstrated numerous incidents of inappropriate behavior continued to fail to learn. They cited that often students with behavior problems were those with poor social skills. When the desired behaviors were

not available to a student. Manuele and Cichelli (1984) believed the teaching of these skills or socially acceptable behavior was necessary for the individual to function more effectively in a variety of interpersonal contexts. Cummings and Haggerty (1997) stated that both the education and business sectors have identified this need.

Social learning techniques are more effective than traditional punitive actions for helping students acquire more positive behavior. Cummings and Haggerty (1997) suggested that social skills instruction is needed to address the critical social needs of the nation's youth. Social skills instruction can have a long-term positive effect on students' interactions with others, on their attitudes toward school, and on their academic achievement (Cummings and Haggerty, 1997).

To be successful socially and professionally, Iannaccone, Wienke, and Cosden (1992) believed people need to complement their cognitive knowledge with good interpersonal skills, character, and a positive but accurate view of self. These goals need to be addressed by teachers in the classroom. The U.S. Department of Labor report listed interpersonal skills as essential for high school graduates if they are to succeed in finding meaningful work. "Developing and supporting models of social skills instruction within secondary classrooms is essential to assuring secondary education's effectiveness in achieving the full range of goals of our educational system and vital to meeting the needs of our nation's adolescents" (Iannoccone, Wienke, and Cosden,1992, p.118).

As cited in the W.T. Grant Consortium on School-Based Promotion of Social Competencies, teachers who use social skills curriculums were more satisfied with their classes and with teaching in general than were teachers who do not

(Iannaccone,Wienke, and Cosden, 1992). Berreth and Berman (1997) stated students can develop social skills through direct instruction, modeling, role-playing, practice in classroom settings, and cooperative learning strategies. However, a new concept in social skills instruction was assigning social skills homework. Not only was this designed to increase the generalization and maintenance of social skills but it also fostered parental involvement (Armstrong and McPherson, 1991).

To promote more positive, goal-oriented student behavior, Stainback (1987) suggested the use of cooperative groups was effective. All students must remain on task and coordinate their efforts if the goal was to be reached. As described by Stainback, disruptive students who are grouped with well-behaved ones displayed less disruptive behavior in the classroom. In addition, Iannaccone, Wienke, and Cosden (1992) believed small group cooperative instruction provided a forum for students to display and learn other social behaviors such as communicating skills, taking turns, sharing ideas, compromising, and producing a product together. At the high school level, additional social skills such as listening and exchanging ideas with peers can be developed.

According to Quinn, Jannasch-Pennell and Rutherford (1995), cooperative learning was the putting together of groups in such a way as to promote individual learning. The class was divided into small groups of three or four students which provided a chance to work as a team to become more adept in social skills. Cooperative groups enhanced learning through building a sense of family in the classroom.

Fawcett and Rasinski (1995) made a comparison with discipline problems teachers faced in 1975 to problems teachers are facing today. The survey confirmed what most teachers have experienced: that problems in today's classrooms are more serious than they

were years ago. In 1975, one problem was talking back to the teacher while in 1995, unruly students were more likely to physically harm the teacher. In 1995, students were not doing their work compared to 1975 where students were behind in their work.

According to McCormack (1989), prevention, not punishment, was the key to effective discipline. McCormack stated that kids who behaved in school were likely to do well in school and vice versa. When misbehavior was reduced, students made speedier progress toward academic goals.

The researchers decided a first step in preventing discipline problems in today's classrooms was to identify and state clearly the classroom rules. Dobson (1992) believed one of the basic needs of schools, along with other elements of society, was a general recognition that rules must be observed. Colvin and Mesendick (1985) reported the use of rules in the classroom focused on teaching students that appropriate behavior had positive consequences and inappropriate behavior had negative consequences. They suggested that students must be taught to respond appropriately in the classroom. According to Colvin and Mesendick (1985), students needed to understand that good behavior made for a positive classroom where people can learn and develop; inappropriate behavior disrupted the classroom and made learning and development difficult or even impossible.

Mendler (1995) recommended that rules be clear, specific, and enforceable. He stated that students should be involved in the rule-making process in order to give students choices whenever possible. Students learned when they were breaking the rules or treading on dangerous ground. Mendler advised using gestures and verbal or

written reminders. Another suggestion Mendler made was allowing a student to solve their own discipline problems by writing a plan on how they might improve their behavior. Also stressed by Mendler was the necessity that the teacher catch a student "doing right" and thank and praise them for their positive behavior.

As a means to improve behavior in the classroom, Mazin (1995) emphasized describing or modeling what was expected from a student, along with speaking positively and avoiding the use of negative language. He also pointed out the need for the student to know what the consequences and rewards of a behavior were, how the students' behavior will be monitored, and why it is necessary to change the behavior.

Fawcett and Rasinski (1995) reported that what the family does to encourage learning was more critical to a student's success than the family's income or education. Several studies showed that when parents got more involved students learned better. Fawcett and Rasinski suggested the following to get parents involved: recruiting a volunteer to coordinate communication with parents; collaborating with parents when problems arise and letting them help determine the child's goals; and using technology to get parents excited about what their children are learning. In addition, McCormack (1989) found that a good system of communications which linked parents, the community, and the school was characteristic of an effective school. Parents were encouraged to drop in at school and become classroom volunteers. Frequently, parents were included as members of curriculum committees, and telephone calls kept parents posted about their children's progress in school.

Berreth and Berman (1997) believed that the alliance schools built with parents helped strengthen the moral support structures that children needed to develop character.

They suggested that the school should function as the center of the neighborhood community by keeping the school building open evenings and weekends for activities, classes, and programs. According to Berreth and Berman, a school that functions as a neighborhood center will encourage parents and community members to share their expertise in building stronger schools.

Herndon (1995) reported on a program for the middle grades, developed by the school's principal, which demonstrated that parental involvement was the key to preventing discipline problems in the classroom. Combined with prevention and interventions, parental involvement brought about the desired changes in the school. Herndon listed a few ways parents were encouraged to become involved. One of the suggestions required meeting with the principal to discuss the student's inappropriate behavior. Other suggestions included parental input in the design of a plan to change the behavior, formation of a school booster club, and incentives for students whose parents attended parent-teacher conferences. Another suggestion was more contact with parents made by teachers about minor concerns.

Albert (1995) cited building a strong partnership with parents as essential in maintaining a positive discipline program that works. Albert suggested teachers can set the stage for effective parent partnerships by discussing with parents which intervention strategies will be used to promote more positive behavior. She advised teachers to send clear messages that teachers want parents to participate in the disciplining of their children. Albert (1995) said that parents needed to be reminded that teachers could not always accomplish everything alone; they needed parental support.

After a review of the literature, the researchers found that parental involvement, creation of classroom rules, social skills instruction, and cooperative learning techniques were effective strategies to be used in improving student behavior and preventing discipline problems in the classroom. For the purpose of this research project, the researchers selected the instruction of social skills. The researchers used direct instruction, cooperative learning, and role-playing materials that matched the social skills being taught. To further reinforce the desired social skills being stressed, the teachers and students developed a set of classroom rules that were posted in clear view in the classrooms.

## Project Outcomes and Solution Components

As a result of implementing cooperative learning, during the period of September 1998 through March 1999, the elementary and high school students from the targeted schools will show an improvement in social skills and a decrease in disciplinary referrals, as measured by baseline data, teacher observations, and student reflections.

Processes to be used to implement this objective include the following:

1. Develop instructional materials incorporating cooperative learning.
2. Rearrange the classroom to accommodate cooperative groups.
3. Assess the group behavior periodically.

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2. Rearrange the classroom to accommodate cooperative groups.
3. Assess the group behavior periodically.

Action plan for the intervention

The action plans presented will be implemented on a biweekly basis to accommodate high school block eight scheduling. The plan will be implemented for a period of 20-30 minutes at least two times a week. It will cover a time frame beginning September 28 through January 29, approximately 16 weeks.

School A

Week 1/2 Social Skill: Following Directions
A. class discussion on following directions/rules
B. cooperative groups will do an activity where the students will do a project on color harmony. The end product will be a color harmony chart.

Week 3/4 Social Skill: Listening/Courtesy
A. class discussion on listening skills and common courtesy.
B. activity: I will first demonstrate all the techniques used in a watercolor painting and they will listen. The students will do a watercolor painting using the techniques described.

Week 5/6 Social Skill: Cooperation/Staying on task
A. class discussion on cooperating with others and staying on task.
B. activity: Students will do a pastel chalks project in a group.

Week 7/8 Social Skill: Respect for other's property
A. class discussion on respect of others and their projects
B. activity: Students will do another pastel project. They will have complete control over what media they use.

Week 9/10 Social Skill: Praising/Agreement
A. class discussion on learning to praise and coming to agreements.
B. activity: Students will do a project of their choice and then we will have a critique in cooperative groups when all projects are done.

Week 11/12 Social Skill: Speaking/Physical control

A. class discussion on speaking and physical control

B. activity: Students will do a painting of a Christmas scene. They will choose from my Christmas pictures file box but will get to use media of their choosing.

Week 13/14 Social Skill: Honesty/Trust

A. class discussion on honesty and trust

B. activity: Students will do a collage that is personal to them and their life using cut pictures from magazines and some drawings of their own.

Week 15/16 Social Skill: Acceptance/Fulfilling role

A. class discussion on acceptance and fulfilling their role.

B. activity: Students will do a perspective house. This is to be their 'dream home' that they might like to have one day.

School B

Week 1/2 Following Directions

A. ( week 1) class discussion: Read "Goals" Chapter 1 in I Can't Accept Not Trying by Michael Jordan. Discuss speed limits and why rules are needed, what rules are needed in the classroom, and how to state rules positively.

B. (week 1) group activity: Cooperative groups of three or four chosen randomly agree on rules needed in class and state them positively.

A. (week 2) class discussion: Read "Fears" Chapter 2 in I Can't Accept Not Trying by Michael Jordan. Discuss why following directions is important.

B. (week 2) group activity: Following directions activity where partners are drawing from each others directions. See p. 296-299 in Blueprints for Thinking in the Cooperative Classroom.

Week 3/4 Listening/Courtesy

A. class discussion: Read "Commitment" Chapter 3 in I Can't Accept Not Trying by Michael Jordan. Discuss what listening looks like/sounds like using T-chart and how not to let other members of the group down.

B. group activity: Use problems on study guide 1-1 from pre-algebra book read them and have students write the answers individually. Divide into pairs randomly and compare answers. have students correct the ones not in agreement on and turn in one paper per pair.

Week 5/6 Cooperation/Staying on task

A. (week 5) class discussion: Play "Fly Like An Eagle" from Space Jam soundtrack and read "Teamwork" Chapter 4 in I Can't Accept Not Trying by Michael Jordan. Discuss how working as a team can be better than working individually. Use basketball and fast food workers stories.

B. (week 5) group activity: Do jigsaw activity in which the cooperative groups of three or four learn the number properties and then teach them to the other members of

their groups. Use poker chips to show the students how to take turns when talking. Do Mrs. Potter's Questions as a reflection.

A. (week 6) class discussion: Watch STOMP tape and discuss how patterns are used in music and math (Mathnet). Discuss how to use different rhythms and work together as a team.

B. (week 6) group activity: Use base groups and have them come up with a unique rhythm, then share that rhythm with the class. Use PMI's as a reflection and have each student answer the question--How does rhythm tie into math?

Week 7/8 Respect for other's property

A. class discussion: Play "Honestly" by Leann Rimes and read poem "The Cookie Thief" by Valerie Cox. Discuss how to respect other's property by asking questions like "What might Valerie have done differently?" and "What was the owner of the cookies thinking when Valerie kept taking his cookies?"

B. group activity: Meet in pairs to discuss how each student would have felt in Valerie's position and then have a class discussion on some answers.

Week 9/10 Praising/Agreement

A. (week 9) class discussion: Play "Your Future's So Bright I Gotta Wear Shades" by Timbuk3 and discuss how we can encourage each other. Read "Mr. Washington" by Les Brown and discuss encouragement Mr. Washington gave to Les.

B. (week 9) group activity: Do p 70-71 in the pre-algebra book as a group of three or four and use encouragement as much as possible.

A. (week 10) class discussion: Read "Zlata's Diary" from the Reader's Digest and set the stage for the survival game. Do the rating as individuals, the divide into groups.

B. (week 10) group activity: Each group needs to agree on the survival game ratings to come out with one answer per group. Play "Reach" from Rhythm of the Games CD while the students are working.

Week 11/12 Speaking/Physical control

A. class discussion: Play "Pay Attention" from Sister Act II soundtrack, then read "Fundamentals" Chapter 5 in I Can't Accept Not Trying by Michael Jordan and show how keeping fundamentals in mind relates to not talking out of turn or fighting.

B. group activity: Use base groups and poker chips to do p. 85 in the pre-algebra book. Be sure to only talk when lay down a poker chip. Do PMI's as a reflection.

Week 13/14 Honesty/Trust

A. class discussion: Discuss how we build trust. Read the "Golden Rules for Living" from A Third Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul and discuss how honesty works to build trust. Watch the tape of interviews and discuss questions asked in an interview.

B. group activity: Use pairs and interview each other. Then individually prepare an introduction of the person interviewed. Answer Mrs. Potter's Questions as a reflection.

Week 15/16 Acceptance/Fulfilling roles

A. class discussion: Play "The Power Inside of Me" from the Mirror Has Two Faces soundtrack and read "Leadership" Chapter 6 in I Can't Accept Not Trying by Michael Jordan. Discuss how to fulfill the assigned roles in the group and not to let the group down.

B. group activity: Have roles of reader, scriber, calculator, and artist in base groups do p. 104-105 in the pre-algebra book. Play "Sacred Spirits" from Pure Moods CD as they work.

School C

Week 1/2 Following Directions/Rules

A. Group discussion: What happens when students come running into the school and the principal asks them to stop and everyone ignores him? Why?

B. Cooperative groups: Think of activities that have rules and need people to follow directions.

C. Brainstorm class list of rules. Literature: Oh Bother! Someone's Messy! by Betty Birney

Week 3/4 Listening/Manners

A. Group discussion-Have a student talk and I would talk at the same time. Discuss what's wrong with this scene, and what should be happening?

B. Cooperative groups-Each group draws a picture showing who they listen to and who listens to them.

C. Brainstorm manners needed at school and home and illustrate them. Literature: Won't You Ever Listen by Carol Cummings, Copy the Cat by Carol Cummings, Please & Thank You Book by Richard Scary, and Berenstain Bears Forget Their Manners by Stan & Jan Berenstain

Week 5/6 Cooperation/Staying on task

A. Group discussion-Discuss meanings of cooperating and staying on task.

B. Cooperative groups-Groups are to brainstorm when you need to cooperate; then when work needs to be done on time. They need to make one illustration from each group. Literature: Sharing is Caring by Carol Cummings

Week 7/8 Respect for other's property

A. Group discussion-You are building with blocks and I walk by and kick it. What happens next? Why?

B. Cooperative groups- Each pair of buddies will role play a time when you need respect other's property in different places (park, your room, school friend's home). Literature: I Was So Mad by Mercer Mayer

Week 9/10 Praising/Agreement

A. Group discussion-T-chart pluses/minuses of agreements (put-ups) and disagreements (put-downs).

B. Cooperative groups-Illustrate "something I do that I am proud of is..." or "I make other people happy when I...". Literature: Sticks and Stones by Carol Cummings, Sassafras by Steven Cosgrove.

Week 11/12 Speaking/Physical controls

A. Group discussion-Set up a situation with a student speaking, the teacher will make noises with a pencil and hand, then talk and bother surrounding students. Use this to lead a discussion about self-control.

B. Cooperative groups-Work on ways to control anger and other annoyances. Each group will act out ways to control themselves. Literature: I'm Always in in Trouble by Carol Cummings, Rollo and Juliet, Forever by Marjorie Sharmat, Sometimes I Get So Mad by P. Hogan, No Fighting, No Biting! by Else Minarik

Week 13/14 Honesty/Trust

A. Group discussion-Start discussion with this situation: You find money on the playground--a five dollar bill. What do you do with it?

B. Cooperative groups-Discuss: Who can be trusted? Why those persons? Illustrate those persons. Literature: King Bob's New Clothes by Dom DeLuise, Junie B. Jones Is Not a Crook by Barbara Park, Tattlin' Madeline by Carol Cummings

Week 15/16 Acceptance/Fulfilling a role

A. Group discussion-What makes you feel good? How can you tell if someone is happy?

B. Cooperative groups-Use color coded cards to role play in groups how different situations would make one feel. Literature: Find Feelings by Carol Cummings, How Does It Feel? by J. Strauss, Catundra by Steven Cosgrove, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst

## Methods of Assessment

To determine the effects of the intervention, behavior checklists will be kept along with classroom performance checklists used throughout the specified time. Student reflections will also be used and a record of student referrals will be maintained and compared with earlier data.

The researchers used behavior checklists on physical control, inappropriate language, excessive talking, and cooperation. The observation checklists included time on task, lack of preparation, and attendance records.

Student reflections at the elementary level were basically pictures describing their feelings about the activity. The reflections students do at the high school level are PMIs, Mrs. Potter's questions, or reflections written in a journal.

# CHAPTER 4

# PROJECT RESULTS

## Historical Description of the Intervention

The objectives of this project were to show a change in the number of disciplinary referrals and in the incidence of students using good social skills. Direct instruction of social skills and cooperative learning were used to effect the desired changes.

Cooperative learning was used along with role-playing to create a set of classroom rules applying the desired social skills. The social skills were taught directly while the students were in cooperative groups.

Some of the skills chosen for cooperative group work were compliance with instructions, encouragement, honesty, and physical control.

The researcher in targeted school A implemented cooperative learning structures, the use of role-play, and direct instruction to get the desired results of improved social skills.

Cooperative learning, direct instruction, and role-playing were used to teach social skills to a targeted group of students while they were in base groups. Groups were comprised of two students per group due to a small number of students in the class. Groups were established during the second week of the intervention and maintained

throughout the sixteen weeks. The interventions were used once every two weeks. Each lesson lasted 90 to 100 minutes each time with the exception of weeks 11/12 and weeks 15/16, which took longer due to the complexity of the projects. One deviation from the original plan occurred in weeks 5/6. The researcher added to the lesson and had the students keep a tally of how many times a group was not cooperating or staying on task. Weeks 7/8 changed in that the researcher did not have the students rotate the three-minute drawing more than once as was originally planned because it was not necessary. Another deviation from the plan was in weeks 9/10. The researcher had the students do a critique of two pictures and write their comments on paper instead of having a verbal discussion. The researcher felt the students would be more honest and free with their comments if they did not have to be put on the spot verbally in front of their peers. Weeks 13/14 also changed in that instead of having the students do a PMI at the end of the lesson, the researcher had them participate in a class discussion. Toward the end of the intervention, in the lesson on honesty and trust, the researcher felt it important that they discuss their feelings on how the students felt about sharing their personal collages with another classmate.

The targeted school B incorporated the direct instruction of social skills with mathematics lessons. Deviating from base groups periodically was necessary because absences occurred. In teaching the cooperation and staying on task lessons, the researcher found it necessary to use a Venn diagram to discuss how mathematics is related to rhythm. When discussing respect for other's property, the researcher changed the meeting in pairs to a T-chart on how Valerie felt and on how the other person in the story felt. There were also changes in page numbers in the pre-algebra book because the class

moved faster than expected. Some other changes included the class watching a group role play how to solve a problem during week 10. Week 11 was done last so discussing speaking out of turn or fighting would fit in after the consequences for the rules were discussed. Week 12 was added in to the action plan to do a round robin listening circle on three topics. The topics were taking away driver's licenses of dropouts, requiring all students to do volunteer work in their community, and allowing students to go off campus for lunch. In week 13, the teacher changed the introduction of the person interviewed to a five-item true-false quiz about their partners. They then played stump the class. The cooperative groups created energizers and even though most did not finish the project, they enjoyed this activity more than most during week 14. Week 16, the students practiced taking turns talking. This activity was to help the students know they should participate and not let the group down.

The researcher in school C used direct instruction, cooperative learning, and role-playing to teach social skills. Social skills were taught directly with cooperative learning and role-playing used as strategies to reinforce and practice these skills. Cooperative groups were in buddy groups of two students that frequently changed membership. The original plan called for two or three half-hour group meetings a week. This plan was generally followed with few exceptions due to altered days and shortened weeks. Some skills required more time due to the necessity to re-teach. Teaching time usually occurred at the class's daily allotted thirty-minute story time or as the concluding activity of the day.

Lesson plans were developed to teach each of the chosen social skills. This researcher used published literature to aid the young students' need for more information

to make background connections with the skills taught. Some literature modifications were necessary due to the book accessibility. Students were often asked to express themselves with a picture due to a lack of written skills. Group brainstorming was frequently used with the researcher as the recorder. Some activities and discussions were added to take advantage of teachable moments.

## Presentation and Analysis of Results

The data collected to assess the effects of direct instruction, cooperative learning, and role playing are displayed in Tables 5, 6, and 7. A daily chart was maintained to show incidents of discipline infractions over the four months of intervention. The data were aggregated by month to show any changes.

Table 5

Categories of Discipline Referrals and Frequencies by Month in School A

| Behavior | October | November | December | January |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Excessive Talking | 5 | 12 | 2 | 3 |
| Insubordination | 4 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Lack of Preparation | 15 | 30 | 32 | 36 |
| Verbal Fighting | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Physical Fighting | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

There were nine students involved in this class in school A during the sixteen-week period. Of the 64 incidents recorded, 67% dealt with a failure in respect, either toward another student or toward the teacher. Thirty-three percent of the incidents dealt with the students' lack of preparation for class. This lack of responsibility included no assignments, work turned in late, and being off task.

Table 6

Categories of Discipline Referrals and Frequencies by Month in School B

| Behavior | October | November | December | January |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Excessive Talking | 4 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| Insubordination | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Lack of Preparation | 3 | 6 | 8 | 4 |
| Verbal Fighting | 6 | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| Physical Fighting | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 |

The intervention appears to have had a positive effect on four targeted behaviors in school B. The researcher found that 24% of the behaviors dealt with disrespect of others. Seventy-six percent of the incidents were recorded for lack of preparation. During the sixteen-week period, there were no incidents of physical fighting.

Table 7

Categories of Discipline Referrals and Frequencies by Month in School C

| Behavior | October | November | December | January |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Excessive Talking | 24 | 16 | 22 | 28 |
| Insubordination | 22 | 22 | 18 | 23 |
| Lack of Preparation | 4 | 7 | 26 | 26 |
| Verbal Fighting | 3 | 8 | 6 | 2 |
| Physical Fighting | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |

The researcher in school C found that 44% of the incidents were related to disrespect for others. This involved excessive talking, physical contact and arguing. This also included disrespect for other students as well as adults. It was found that 32% of the incidents were related to students' irresponsibility or lack of preparation for class.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The researchers recommended teaching cooperative learning, direct instruction of social skills, and using role-play. Cooperative learning worked best in a group of 3 or 4 students.

In school A, based on the interventions and data collected, the students showed an increase in their lack of respect towards others and a decrease in incidents of students' being prepared for class. The intervention seems to have had a positive effect on excessive talking, insubordination, and lack of preparation for class noting that the numbers decreased while having a negative effect on arguing and physical contact in that the numbers both increased. Several factors may have affected the results. The class size

was different. At the time of the first collection of data, the researcher had a class of sixteen students and during the implementation, a class of nine students was used. The number of students can make a difference because poor behaviors tend to decrease with a smaller number. This was found to be true except in the categories of arguing and physical contact. The numbers in those categories were affected by the behavior of one particular student who was in the implementation class of nine. The student exhibited more poor behaviors than did the average student. The duration of the first collection was nine weeks and the implementation time period was sixteen weeks. The period of time automatically made the numbers different because the students did not have the same amount of time to exhibit behaviors. As noted in the first nine weeks, there were 102 total incidents recorded and only 64 incidents in the sixteen-week period. The time of the year was also different. The first collection of data was done in the spring and the intervention was done in the fall. In the fall, behavior is generally better than in the spring. The numbers for March, April, and May were higher, especially in the categories of excessive talking and lack of preparation.

The researcher in school B has found that with continued practice of social skills, some high school students changed their behavior that resulted in an improvement in their organizational skills. Through cooperative learning, the goal of improving social skills was met. These researchers found when working with high school age children, no one strategy worked with all students. There were some students who were not affected by the direct instruction of social skills or by the use cooperative learning in the classroom. This did not discredit these methods but was a reality of life in the classroom. Although further study is warranted, the researcher has begun to use the techniques that

worked best with one class in subsequent classes. The researcher found value in the lessons that were presented and, with some changes, plans to use several of the lessons again as an introduction to cooperative learning.

In doing the action research project, the researchers found some surprising results. One student made a comment that she had worked in groups before but only in this class had the groups worked cooperatively. Throughout the intervention period, the students were still afraid of making mistakes even though they were constantly reminded of the fact that they did not have to be perfect.

Giving the class the freedom to state the rules and consequences used in class made them more agreeable to following the rules. At high school age, the researcher observed that the students were self-governing when given the chance.

When the researcher did the lesson on how rhythm and mathematics are related, the students were very uncooperative. The activity was to promote teamwork by having each group create their own rhythm. Some groups instead used the opportunity to cause disruptions in class.

Attendance seemed to be a big problem in the class doing the intervention. When the students missed several days per week, the effects of the intervention were hard to see in these particular students. After the class created the rules and consequences, there was improvement as noted by more students paying attention in class.

One part of the intervention was teaching and modeling encouragement. The students had a great deal of trouble encouraging each other without sounding insincere. The researcher found that this was an area where constant reminders were needed.

By the tenth week of the intervention, the students seemed to be dealing with cooperative learning in a more positive way. The groups used consensus to solve a survival problem and worked well together in the team building part of the activity.

In the students' reflections, the researcher found that at first the cooperative groups were not working well together, thought the problems were too hard, and had one or more students not participating. The researcher noted after the intervention, through observation checklists, that the cooperative groups were able to work together to solve the problems. There were fewer incidents of students not participating and the problems seemed easier. In the students' journals, it was interesting to note that the feelings the students had were affected by the way they felt about strangers. The students had the idea that strangers would not share with them. Through direct instruction of social skills, the students began to see how to cooperate with other people, including strangers.

The researcher observed the improvement of social skills at a basketball game after the sixteen weeks of intervention. Rude comments were made among the students about the other team. The researcher discussed the inappropriate comments the following day in class. During the next game, the researcher observed that the number of comments had lessened by a great amount. To see the effect of direct instruction of social skills outside of the classroom was exciting. This was an excellent way to demonstrate student transfer of what was learned in class to a real life situation without direct supervision.

Traditionally, fourth grade students have more homework than first grade students. The incidents of lack of preparation were directly related to the maturity of the student. Most of the homework for first grade did not begin until November and

December. Another factor that changed was the number of students; the researcher had 21 fourth graders compared to 14 first graders.

The referrals for disrespect were affected also by the age and maturity of the students. The younger students were much more aggressive physically than the older students. These students had to learn what was acceptable at school. Aggressive physical contact was stressed as not being acceptable at school. Therefore, any physical contact was too much. The older students and the younger students both tested to check how much this researcher would tolerate. Some continued to challenge adults as well as other students.

From this project the researcher concluded that the younger students had different needs than older students. Younger students needed fewer social skills directly taught, but those that were taught should be more concentrated. That is, more time needed to be spent on each of the skills to be taught. One week per skill was not enough.

The observational checklists showed that the students developed more of an awareness of social skills. These checklists documented that students changed due to the strategies used in that most students' inappropriate social skills were affected. After role-playing and instruction on these matters, students saw how they behaved inappropriately. Role-playing correct listening skills did make a difference. There were observable changes in the students. Students reminded other students that they needed to be listening. Tattling was another skill that improved. The checklist proved that the students were more aware of differences between reporting and tattling. Students role-played both tattling and reporting in small cooperative groups. Students signaled with a hand sign that

another student was tattling and suggested an alternative strategy. Students enjoyed these activities as well as learned appropriate behavior.

An increased awareness of social skills was noted in all targeted classrooms. Another strategy that the researchers could have used was to get the parents more involved in the intervention. Parents could have been utilized as a source of reinforcement. This aspect was not used, but upon the next try, it should definitely be explored as an option. In order to see more effective results, the researchers recommend the development a social skills program beginning at the elementary level and continuing through twelfth grade. The program needs to be more concentrated at the elementary level, diminishing as the student progresses. The acquired social skills will be an important asset to the transfer from student life to the working world of the future. These social skills are essential for forming life-long relationships with community, school, and family.

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Appendix A
Teacher Survey

| | Often 4 | Sometimes 3 | Seldom 2 | Never 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Students come unprepared for class. | | | | |
| 2. Students are not staying on task. | | | | |
| 3. Students use inappropriate language. | | | | |
| 4. Students exhibit unnecessary physical contact. | | | | |
| 5. Students show disrespect to peers. | | | | |
| 6. Students show disrespect to teachers. | | | | |
| 7. Students exhibit unnecessary noise in the classroom. | | | | |

Any further comments:

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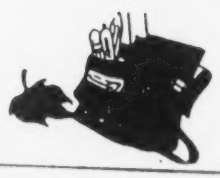
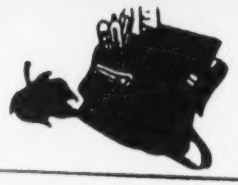
Appendix B
High School Observation Checklist

Ratings:
2: Frequently
1: Sometimes
0: Not Yet



| | Daily Task | Participation | Team Work | | |

Appendix C
Behavior Checklist



| Student | Excessive Talking | Insubordination | Lack of Preparation | Verbal Fighting | Physical Fighting | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 14 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 18 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 21 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 24 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 26 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 31 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 32 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Teacher _____ Subject _____ Grade _____ Date _____



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Appendix D
Elementary School Observation Checklist

# OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Teacher: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Target Skills: _____

Ratings:
✚ = Frequently
✓ = Sometimes
○ = Not Yet

| NAMES OF STUDENTS | | | | | | | COMMENTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | | | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | | | |
| 4. | | | | | | | |
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| 18. | | | | | | | |
| 19. | | | | | | | |

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